

Copyright is owned by the Author of the thesis. Permission is given for a copy to be downloaded by an individual for the purpose of research and private study only. The thesis may not be reproduced elsewhere without the permission of the Author.

**New Zealand Primary School Teachers' Preparedness to Teach  
Children with Chronic Illnesses**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master  
of  
Educational Psychology

At Massey University, Albany, New Zealand

Nicola Leigh Adams

2018

## **Abstract**

All children are entitled to good quality education where they can learn alongside their peers from qualified, registered, and well supported teachers. However, previous research suggests that some teachers are underprepared and inadequately resourced to meet the needs of children living with chronic illnesses and that this can exacerbate the academic and social challenges these children may face in an educational context. Using a mixed-methods approach, this study examined New Zealand primary school teachers' preparation and experiences in teaching children with chronic illnesses. Fifty-five teachers responded to an online survey that gathered both quantitative and qualitative data. The results were further explored with a purposive nested sample ( $N = 4$ ) using in-depth follow-up interviews. Seventy-eight percent of the survey respondents had not received any initial teacher education training with regards teaching children with chronic illnesses, and almost half (47%) had not undertaken any in-service professional learning and development. Information and supports available to teachers tended to have a specific focus on medical needs, with limited consideration for potential academic and social implications. Consistent with international findings, the results of this study indicate the need for improved teacher education, more readily accessible information and support, and further opportunities for interprofessional collaboration. The results extend on the international literature by highlighting a strength-based, family-centred approach to working with these learners. Teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are identified as an important area for further research on this topic.

*Keywords:* Childhood chronic illness, inclusive education, teacher education, primary school, mixed-methods, interprofessional collaboration, teacher self-efficacy

## Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis is thanks in large part to the wonderful people who have encouraged, challenged, and persevered with me along the way. I would like to extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to my supervisors, Associate Professor Roseanna Bourke and Terence Edwards. Thank you for allowing me to pursue a topic of great interest to me and for patiently guiding me through the research process. I am indebted to your on-going support, thoughtful critique, and professional expertise. Thank you also to Ceri John who was instrumental in the early stages of this research. It has been a pleasure and privilege to learn from all three of you. Thank you to two fantastic teachers and friends, Mr and Mrs W, along with colleagues who helped me to arrive at my research topic. I hope to draw attention to an important area of your professional practice for which you may not always get the support and recognition that is due. Many thanks to the teachers who contributed their time to this study - I was very motivated to do justice to the stories you kindly shared. Last, an enormous thanks to my family, friends, and colleagues for being so very patient and supportive throughout this endeavour. I am certainly looking forward to spending more time with you all.

*Phase I of this study was reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application 17/21 (see Appendix A). The second phase was evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it was not reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees (see Appendix B).*

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this thesis to my loving and patient husband. Thank you for your consistent support and encouragement through a challenging year, all the while quietly accomplishing your own career goals. I am immensely proud of you and so very thankful for all that you do.

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Acknowledgements .....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>Dedication .....</b>	<b>iv</b>
<b>Table of Contents .....</b>	<b>v</b>
<b>List of Figures.....</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>List of Tables .....</b>	<b>viii</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction .....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter 2 Literature Review .....</b>	<b>6</b>
Chronic Illness in an Educational Context .....	8
Young People with Chronic Illness and Their Interactions with Teachers .....	12
Teachers' Preparedness to Teach Children with Chronic Illnesses .....	15
The Teacher Experience .....	18
The Current Study .....	21
<b>Chapter 3 Methodology .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>Research Paradigm .....</b>	<b>23</b>
Ontological and epistemological perspective.....	23
Methodological perspective .....	24
Research design.....	25
<b>Target Population .....</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Phase I: The Survey.....</b>	<b>27</b>
Phase I data collection.....	29
Phase I sampling procedure .....	30
Phase I data analysis.....	31
<b>Phase II: The Interviews .....</b>	<b>32</b>
Phase II sampling procedure .....	33
Phase II data collection .....	34
Phase II data analysis .....	34
<b>Methodological Quality Criteria .....</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Ethical Considerations .....</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Chapter 4 Results.....</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Section A: Phase I – The Survey .....</b>	<b>42</b>
Demographics .....	42
Teachers' preparedness to teach children with chronic illnesses .....	45
Formal preparation. ....	45
Knowledge.....	46
Confidence.....	47
Prioritising physical wellbeing over academics. ....	49
The teacher experience.....	49
Challenges to practice.....	50
Approach to practice.....	53
Teachers' recommendations for change. ....	55

Summary .....	56
<b>Section B: Phase II – The Interviews .....</b>	<b>56</b>
Kelly .....	57
Maria .....	59
Abby .....	61
Tanya .....	62
Summary .....	63
<b>Chapter 5 Discussion .....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Teachers’ Preparedness to Teach Children with Chronic Illnesses .....</b>	<b>64</b>
Knowledge and formal preparation .....	64
Prioritising physical wellbeing over academics .....	66
Confidence and self-efficacy .....	66
<b>The Teacher Experience .....</b>	<b>68</b>
“Don’t stress!” – A focus on professional joys and rewards .....	68
“Learn everything you can” – A case-specific approach .....	69
“Work as a team” – Key partnerships in supporting children with chronic illnesses .....	71
Partnering with whānau .....	72
Partnering with the child. ....	73
Partnering with teacher aides .....	74
Partnering with medical professionals .....	75
Visibility in policy .....	76
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>Chapter 6 Conclusion .....</b>	<b>80</b>
<b>Implications .....</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Suggestions for Research .....</b>	<b>83</b>
<b>Limitations .....</b>	<b>85</b>
<b>Conclusion .....</b>	<b>86</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>88</b>
<b>Appendices .....</b>	<b>104</b>

## List of Figures

<i>Figure 1</i>	Typical mixed-methods sequential explanatory design	26
<i>Figure 2</i>	Specific mixed-methods design employed in this study	27
<i>Figure 3</i>	Respondents' self-reported knowledge of nine childhood chronic illnesses	47
<i>Figure 4</i>	Teachers' self-reported attitudes toward a hypothetical child with chronic illness	48
<i>Figure 5</i>	Resources teachers had consulted about the needs of a child with chronic illness	54
<i>Figure 6</i>	Resources perceived by teachers to be most valuable	54



## List of Tables

<i>Table 1</i>	Phase I Demographics	43
<i>Table 2</i>	Survey Respondents' Roles and Schools	44
<i>Table 3</i>	Teachers' ITE and PLD regarding Chronic Illness	45
<i>Table 4</i>	Type and Content of PLD	46
<i>Table 5</i>	Teachers' Questions About a Child with Chronic Illness	49
<i>Table 6</i>	Chronic Illnesses with Which Teachers Shared Their Recent Experience	50
<i>Table 7</i>	Challenges Encountered by Teachers when Working with Children who are Chronically Ill	51
<i>Table 8</i>	Teachers' Approach to Working with Children with Chronic Illness	52
<i>Table 9</i>	Respondents' Recommendations for Change	56
<i>Table 10</i>	Phase II Demographics	57
<i>Table 11</i>	Summary of Phase II Data According to Phase I Themes	57